

**Matthew Bryza,
U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and
OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair,
Interview with APA Washington Bureau
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APA: There are different interpretations of the outcome of the Prague meeting. From your perspective, was it a successful one or not?

Bryza: Prague, I would argue, was the most constructive meeting between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia that we the current team of Co-Chairs have experienced. We wish that there would have been a breakthrough. There was not quite a breakthrough. But what the Presidents discussed, I believe, set them up to reach a breakthrough when they come together next in Saint Petersburg.

APA: After Prague meeting many online sources quoted you saying that “for the first time, the presidents agreed on the basic ideas surrounding those points (in negotiations)”. So the presidents agreed on those ideas and reached a breakthrough or not?

Bryza: I was talking about some specific points. What I talked about was a handful of remaining points among our Basic Principles that have not yet been agreed and these are the subjects of the discussions in Prague, in Saint Petersburg and for the meetings of the presidents over the last 2 years. There is a handful of specific points within the Basic Principles and what I said --, and I stand by it -- and my colleagues Yuri Merzlyakov and Bernard Fassier fully agree, because they are ones who convinced me about what I am about to say. The presidents for the first time, when they their discussions, indicated that they agreed on the basic ideas surrounding those handful of remaining points on the Basic Principles. I am not talking about all the Basic Principles. Many of them are agreed in concept, but there are a lot of details that must still be negotiated. But, in terms of the basic concepts that become the Basic Principles there are a handful left that are not agreed and of those handful not agreed for the first time the presidents showed that they agree on the basic idea of how to resolve those points.

APA: Novruz Mammadov of the President’s Office stated that you released the statement in Prague without consulting with the Azeri side. Is it a true?

Bryza: I made my statement after leaving the meeting of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia and their Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the fellow Co-Chairs. I am a mediator and I made my own assessments. My job as a mediator is to observe and try to facilitate the discussions to bring them to agreement. Another part of my job is characterizing what I saw and so I was offering my opinion as a Co-Chair. Mr. Mammadov wasn’t in any of those meetings. He wasn’t at the one on one between the two Presidents and wasn’t at the meeting of the Co-Chairs with the foreign ministers and the Presidents. So he doesn’t know what happened at those meetings first hand. I do because I was there and that’s why I was offering my assessment.

I am a professional diplomat and I would never as a professional question in public the integrity of another diplomat. He was questioning my integrity by saying that perhaps I am not telling the

truth to my Secretary of State or the President. I would never make such accusations and certainly when I report back to my top leaders, I tell them exactly what I think in as accurate a way as possible. Mr. Mammadov has been a true friend of peace and our process, and U.S.-Azerbaijani relations. I assume that he wasn't quoted accurately.

APA: As some sources indicate the meeting in Prague has failed because the President of Armenia required to set an exact date on which the referendum will be held on the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Bryza: As a policy I will not comment on actual specifics of the negotiations. What I observed is that Azerbaijani side was disappointed that there wasn't more progress made. So I wish there had been more progress made as well. I can say that President Aliyev was very constructive. I have come to know President Sarkisyan as quite constructive and bold as well. So we hope that when Saint Petersburg happens we will see both presidents feeling sufficiently comfortable if we Co-Chairs do enough good work in the meantime to make that breakthrough that I had hoped would happen in Prague

APA: Novruz Mammadov also said that Co-Chairs are reluctant to name Armenia as an aggressor country. Why UN, the Council of Europe in the resolutions can call Armenia an aggressor country but you can't?

Bryza: Because the Co-Chairs' job is different. Co-Chairs are not political organizations like Council of Europe or UN. Co-Chairs are mediators. Our job is to help the parties agree between themselves on how to establish peace. Our job is to get them to agree. Our job is not to issue political statements. Governments and international organizations issue political statements. With all due respect to Mr. Mammadov, he is a great public servant for many years, but I think he is asking the Co-Chairs to behave not as Co-Chairs, but as politicians. We are not. We are mediators and we have to mediate. If somebody is interested in scoring political points like in football match, that person is called politician. That is not what mediator does.

At the end, I want to say that as a mediator in this same spirit that I have described to you, I am fully committed with my co-chair counterparts to using every ounce of energy I have to help the two Presidents eliminate the remaining differences on those points that I was describing a moment ago and agree to them in Saint Petersburg. It is possible. It is time to look forward. I don't have any hard feelings about any criticism that anyone levels toward me. It is good to know what people think. I want to just ask first, people listen very carefully to specific words that I use. You know that "Echo Moscow" changed their transcript; they got the transcript wrong in our recent interview in Prague. As much I am friend of Azerbaijan and as much as I am friend of Armenia, my job now isn't to strengthen U.S.-Azerbaijani or U.S. Armenian relations. My job is to mediate the conflict, help the Presidents and the peoples to reconcile.

APA: And positive momentum still exists for reaching a breakthrough in Saint Petersburg?

Bryza: Of course it does. By the way, in deference to Novruz, let me say one more time that President Aliyev is showing strong leadership. If Novruz wants us to state it more clearly I am

very happy to state that, because it is true. The president of Azerbaijan is showing strong and courageous leadership in a way that very firmly defends Azerbaijan national interest. But also he is forward looking, and hopefully we will soon get a peace agreement.

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